

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The U.S. Department of Agriculture has declared a natural disaster for Fresno and Madera counties due to drought conditions.

The designation includes surrounding counties -- including Monterey and San Benito -- which means local farm operators are eligible to be considered for assistance from the Farm Service Agency.

"With our economy suffering and families facing tough times, it's important that we protect our food supply and support our local farmers," said Congressman Sam Farr (D-Carmel). "The ongoing drought will continue to hurt our farmers, and I'm pleased that the USDA will provide assistance."

The assistance includes FSA emergency loans as well as the Supplemental Revenue Assistance Payments Program, which was approved as part of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008. FSA will consider each application on its own merit by taking into account the extent of losses, security available and repayment ability.

For more information, farm operators can contact the Monterey County Farm Service Agency at 831-424-1036 or the San Benito County Farm Service Agency at 831-637-4360.

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